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OPENING STATEMENT
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON
CANADA LYNX INTERAGENCY NATIONAL SURVEY
AND ENDANGERED SPECIES DATA COLLECTION
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 2002

I was very troubled this past December when I was informed that several Federal and state employees involved in the Canadian Lynx Interagency National Survey had submitted at least five unauthorized samples of lynx hair to the laboratory. Chairman McInnis and I requested that the Inspectors General and the GAO investigate these allegations. Today's hearing will focus on the results of these inquests.

I would first like to thank the Inspectors General from both the Department of Interior and the Department of Agriculture for acting so quickly in response to our letter. I would also like to thank the GAO for their timely report, and look forward to discussing the reports from all three agencies today in this hearing.

We will attempt to answer some of the many questions that have been raised by concerned citizens, members of this Committee, and the scientific community. Did the actions of these seven individuals adversely affect the National Lynx Survey? How was this allowed to happen? What, if any, safeguards and checks and balances do these two agencies have in place now to keep this from happening again? Most importantly, what else has occurred that we do not know about yet?

While I served as the Chairman of the Ethics Committee, my beliefs in integrity and personal accountability were reinforced daily. Public officials in any capacity, including employees of Federal and state agencies, should be held to the highest standards of moral and ethical conduct. We have the mantle of the public trust on our shoulders, and we must act accordingly. When we breach this trust, we must be willing not only to accept what we have done, but also to pay the consequences of our actions.

In the issue before us today, this has not happened. In fact, while involved Forest Service employees received "counseling", Fish and Wildlife Service scientists that submitted unauthorized samples actually received merit pay raises for their work on the Lynx study.

These seven scientists acted in direct violation of peer-reviewed agency protocol. Their actions were more than mere reflections of "bad judgment". Each of the individuals involved blatantly disregarded the rules that governed the survey. In doing so, besides being unprofessional and unethical, they put the credibility of the entire survey on the line and, if we had not been notified and intervened, could have affected the management decisions in fifteen states and fifty-seven national forests.

Many of us have heard these types of allegations before. This situation was brought to light by a retiring Forest Service employee on his last day of work. I wonder how many similar incidents have occurred without our knowledge - how many management decisions have been affected by results that were tainted by breeches of protocol like this.

Some of these scientists stated that they were only testing the system by submitting unauthorized control samples, making sure that the lynx hair could be identified. If this is true, it shows a fundamental mistrust that these scientists have for the very science they are using. This is very, very troubling.

We need to make sure that this type of incident does not happen again. Poor decisions and bad judgment cannot be the basis for the management policy on our public lands. The agencies involved must institute checks and balances from within. Most importantly, all management decisions must be based on sound science.

I hope that many of our questions and concerns may be answered today. I look forward to our discussion.

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